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Sun et al.

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(54) **METHODS AND APPARATUSES HAVING
MEMORY CELLS INCLUDING A
MONOLITHIC SEMICONDUCTOR
CHANNEL**

USPC 257/321; 438/258
See application file for complete search history.

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29/7889 (2013.01)

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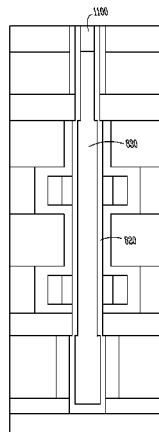
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

Methods for forming a string of memory cells, apparatuses
having a string of memory cells, and systems are disclosed.
One such method for forming a string of memory cells forms
a source material over a substrate. A capping material may
be formed over the source material. A select gate material
may be formed over the capping material. A plurality of
charge storage structures may be formed over the select gate
material in a plurality of alternating levels of control gate
and insulator materials. A first opening may be formed
through the plurality of alternating levels of control gate and
insulator materials, the select gate material, and the capping
material. A channel material may be formed along the
sidewall of the first opening. The channel material has a
thickness that is less than a width of the first opening, such
that a second opening is formed by the semiconductor
channel material.

11 Claims, 18 Drawing Sheets



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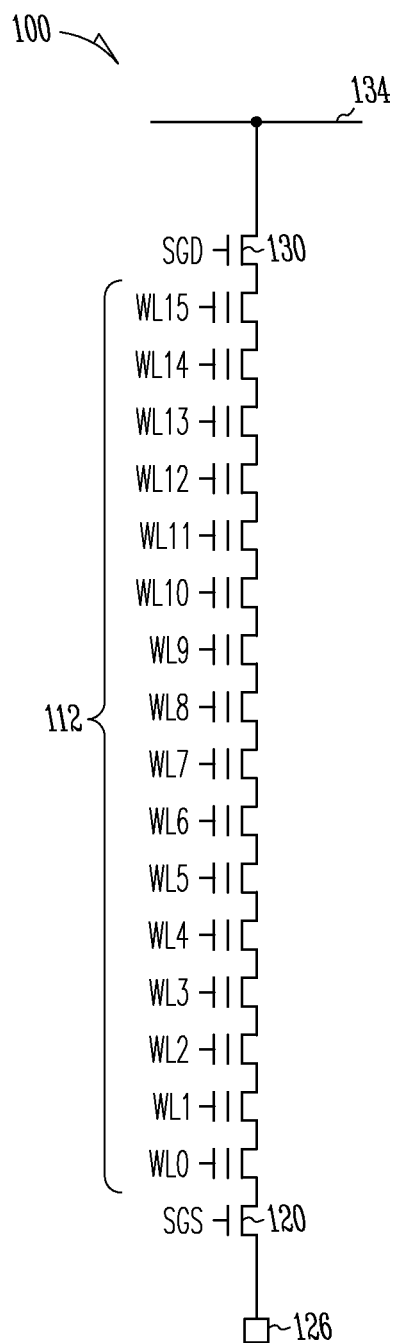


Fig. 1

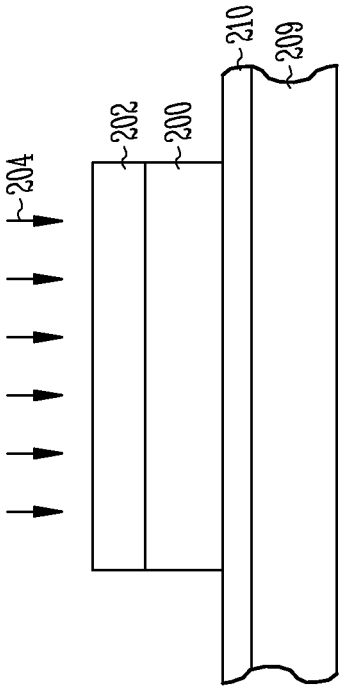


Fig. 2

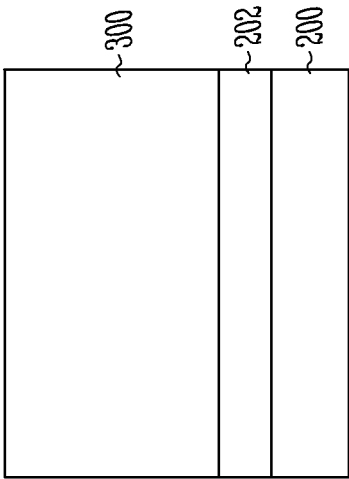


Fig. 3

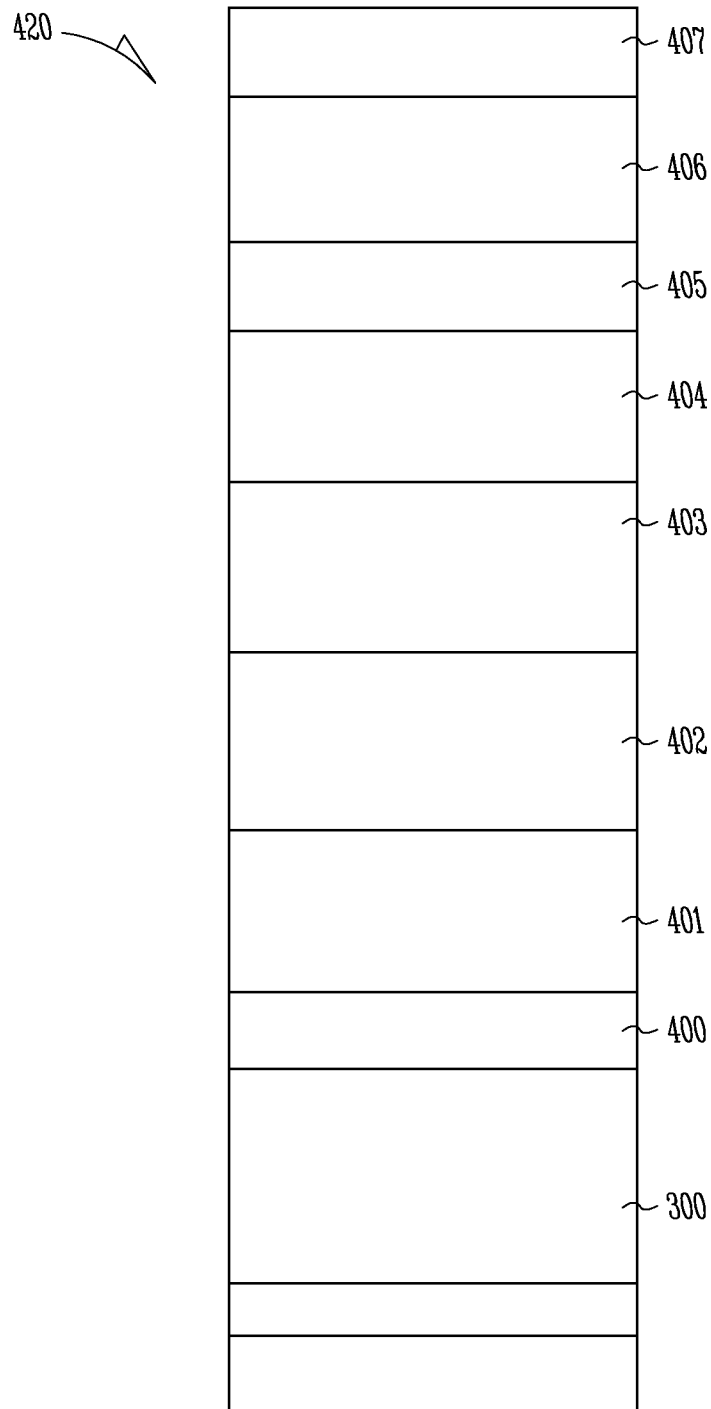


Fig. 4

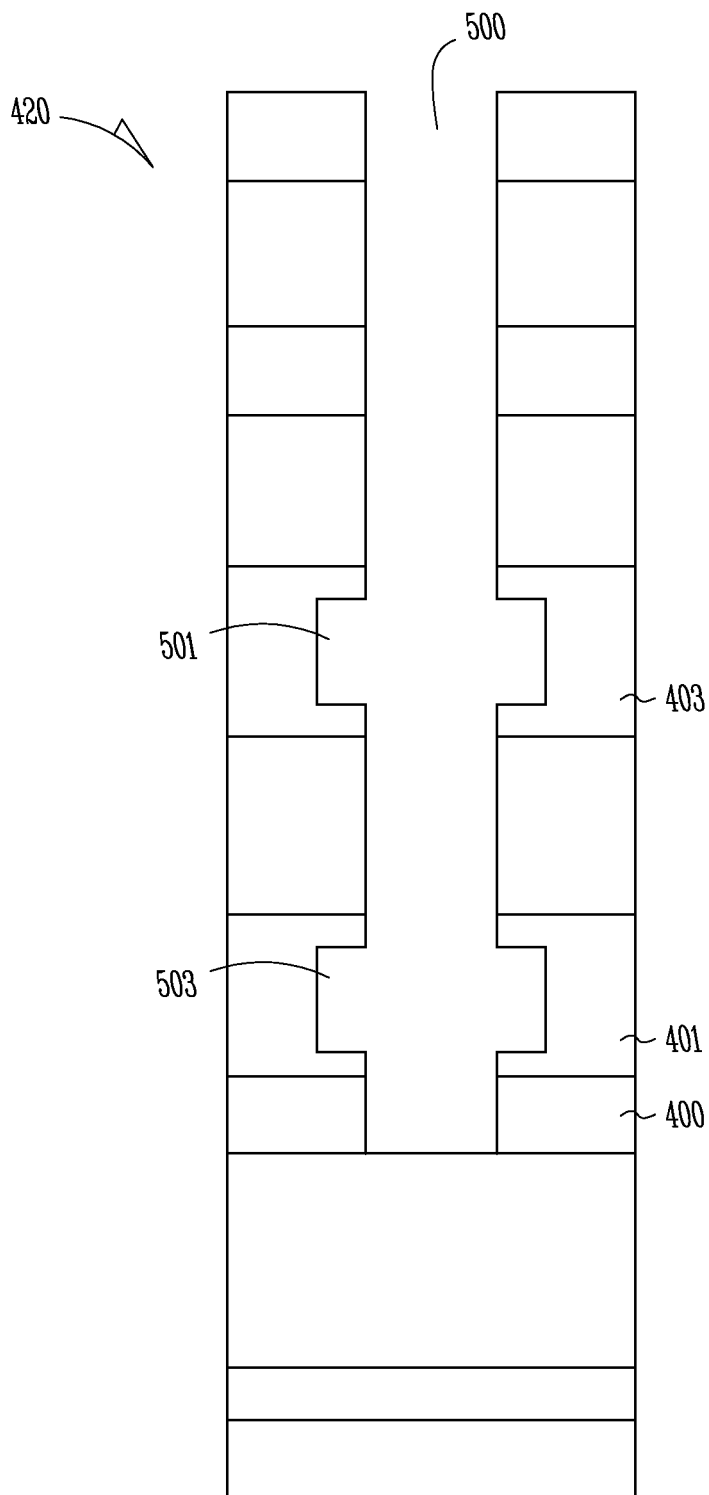


Fig. 5

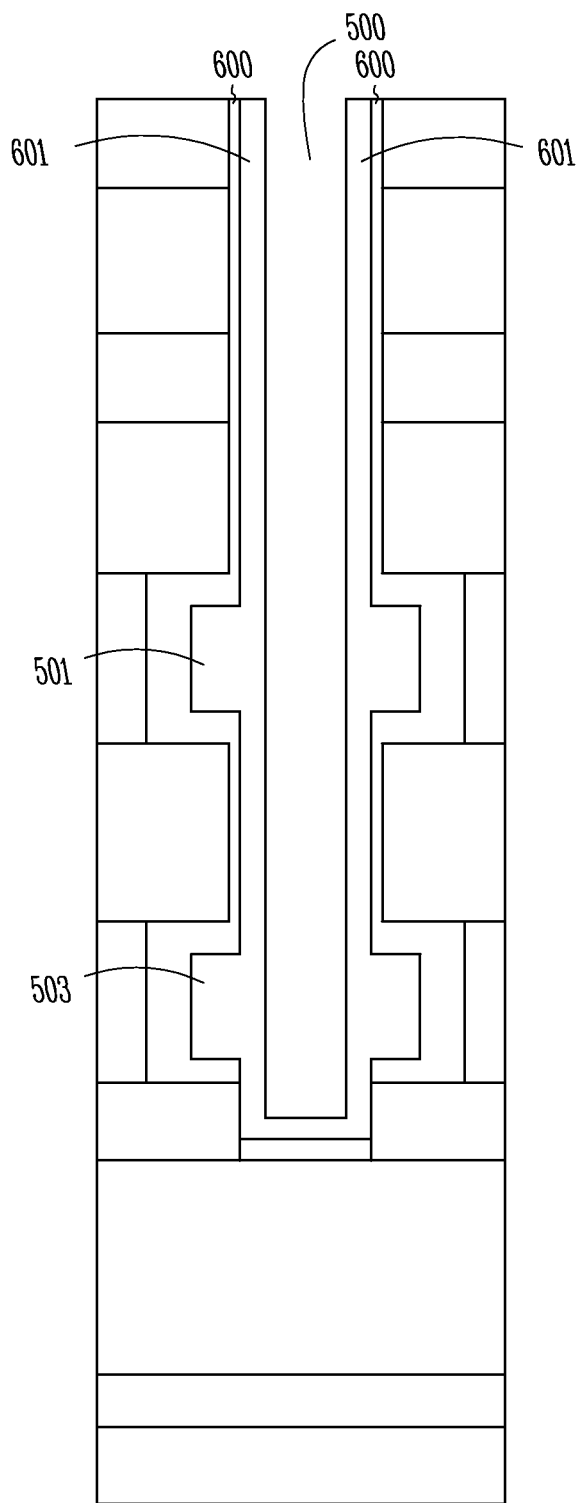


Fig. 6

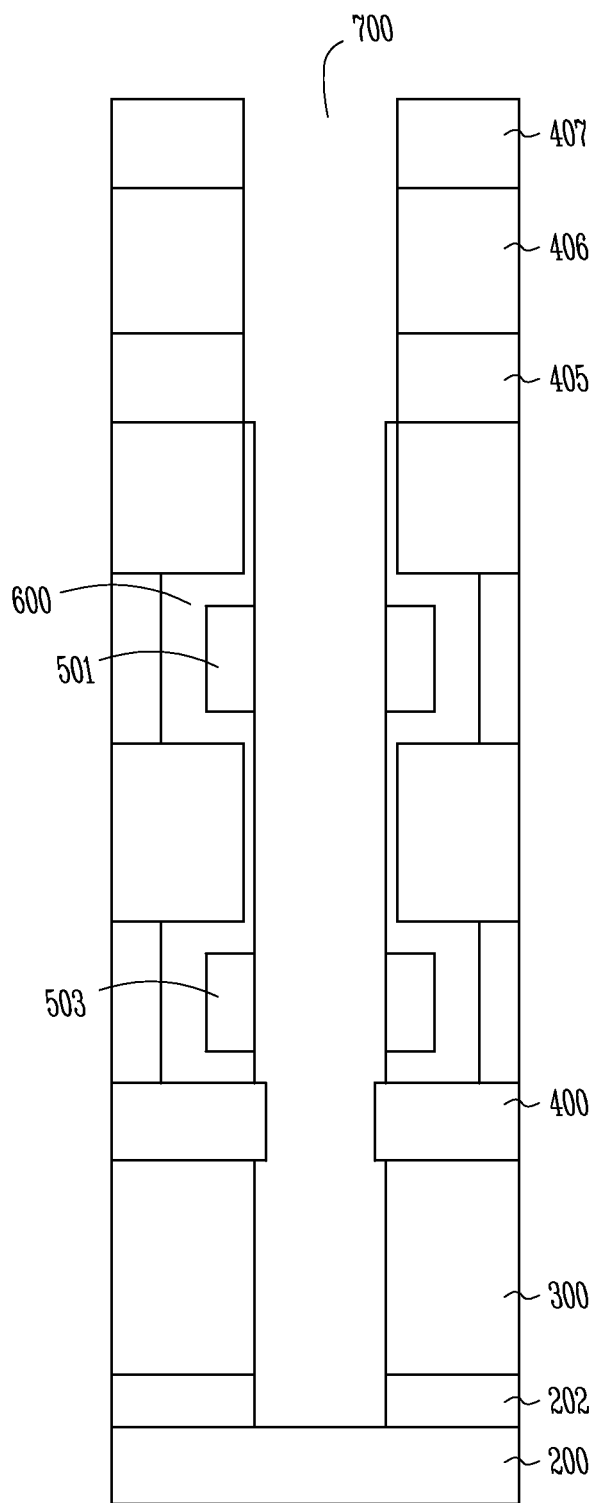


Fig. 7

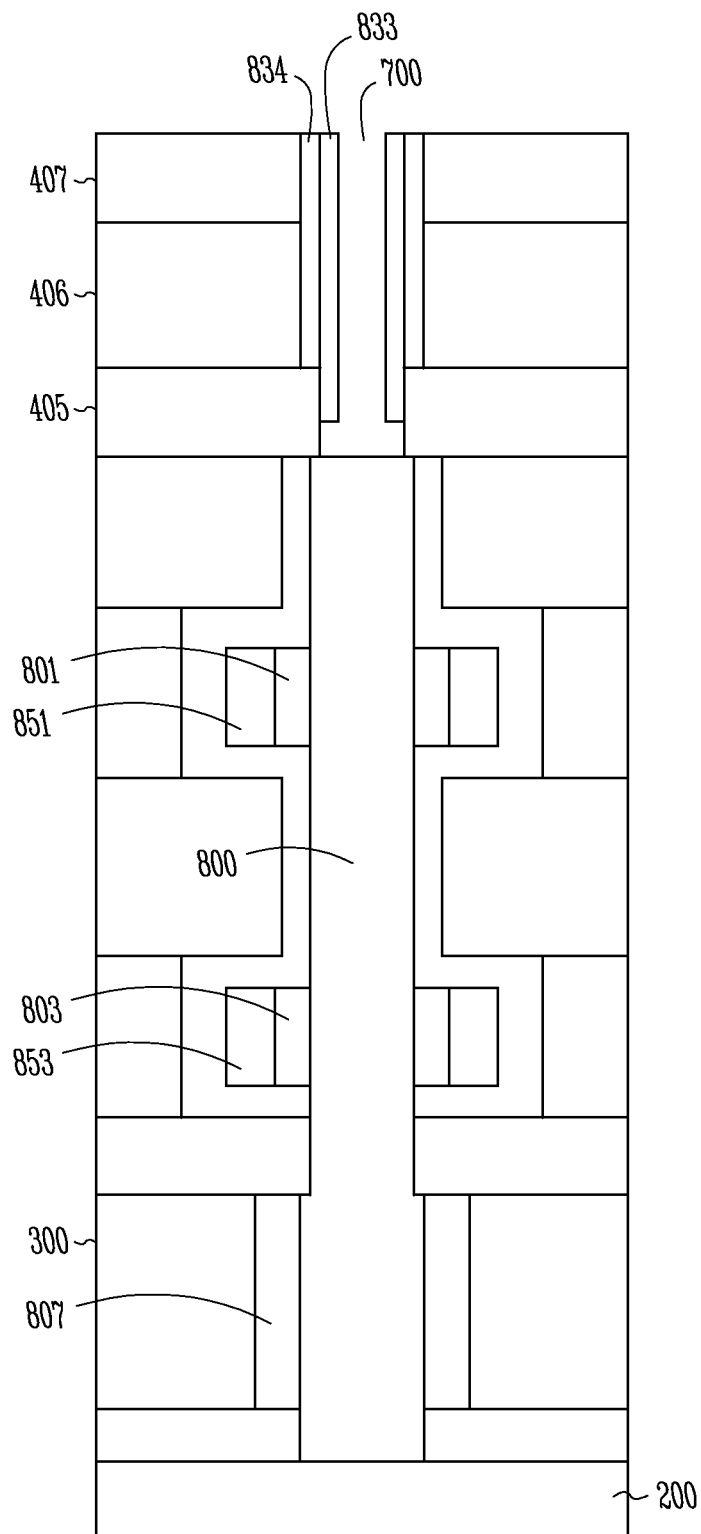


Fig. 8

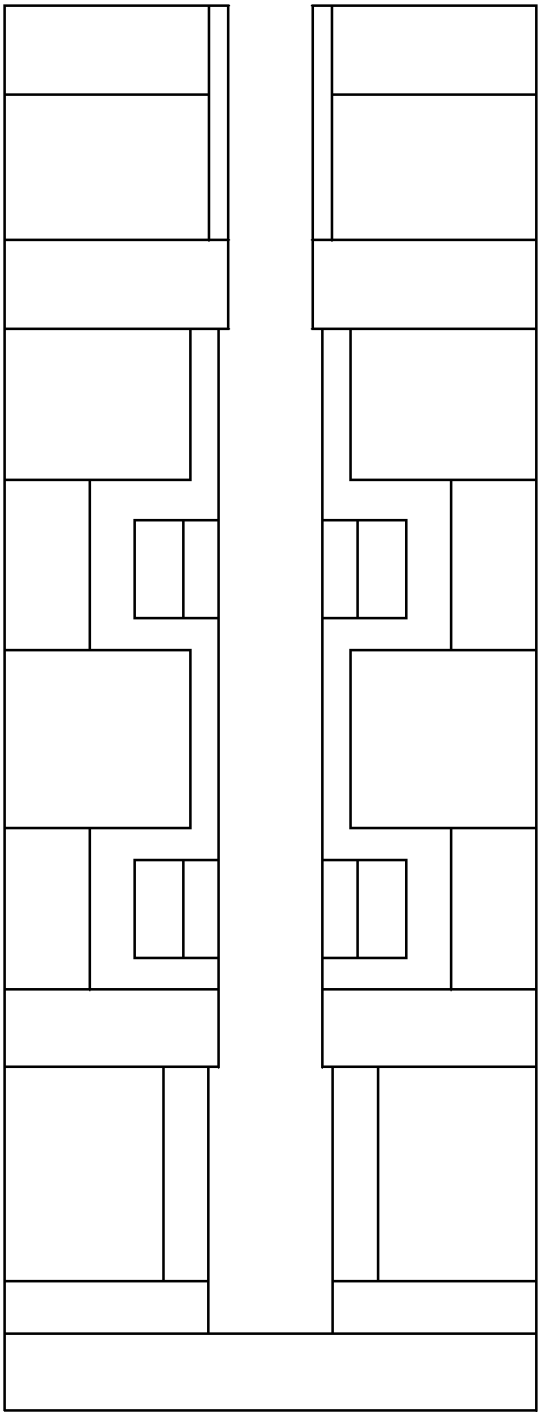


Fig. 9

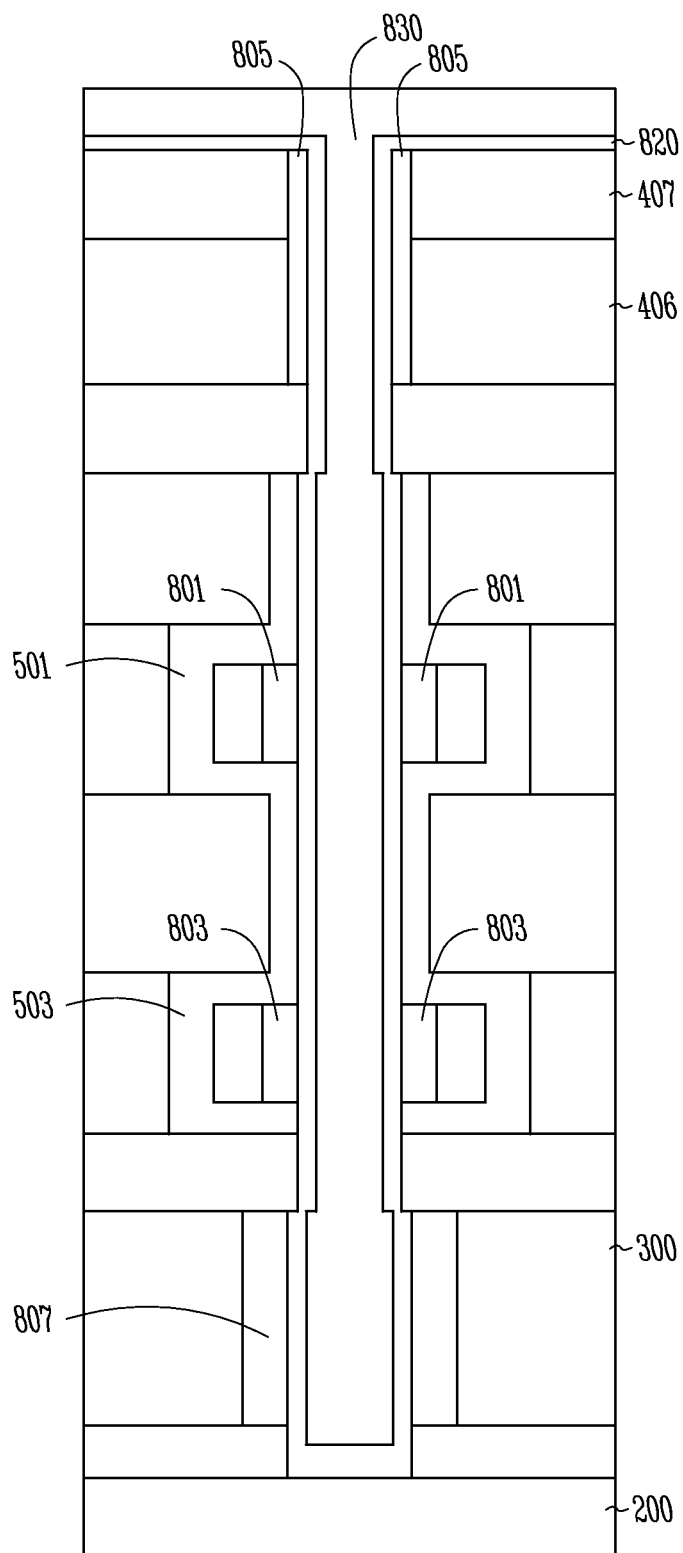


Fig. 10

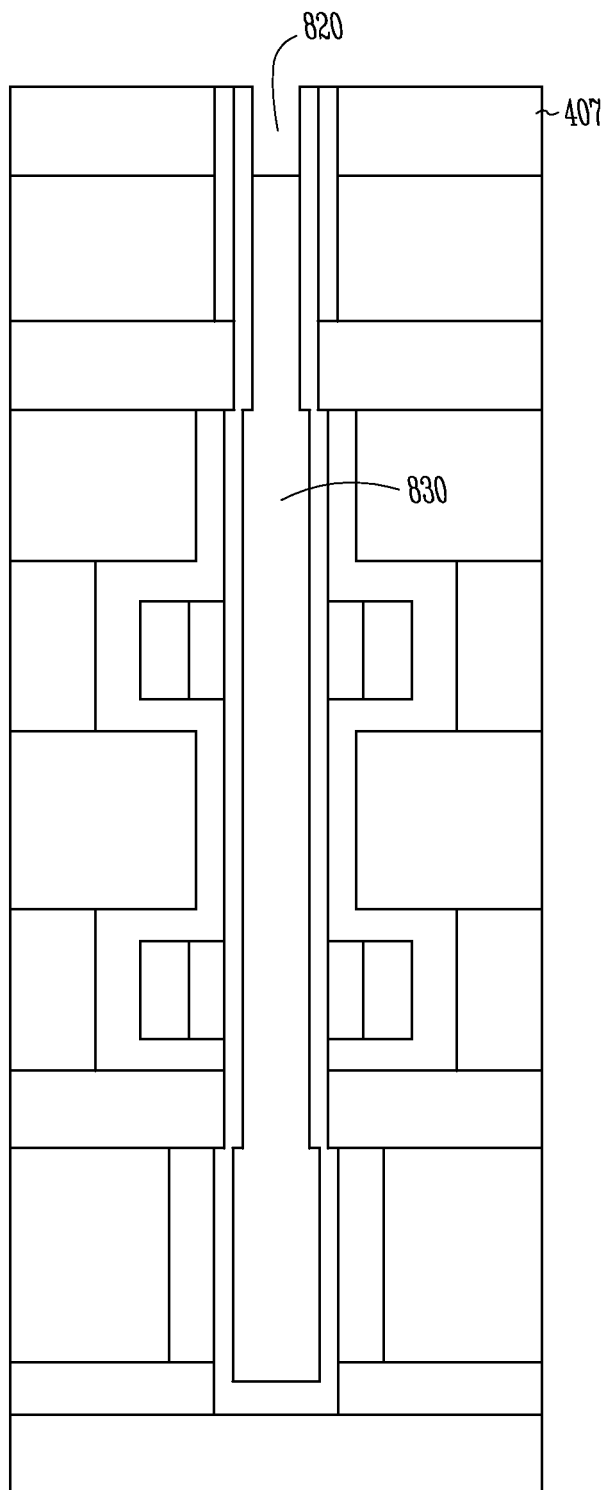


Fig. 11

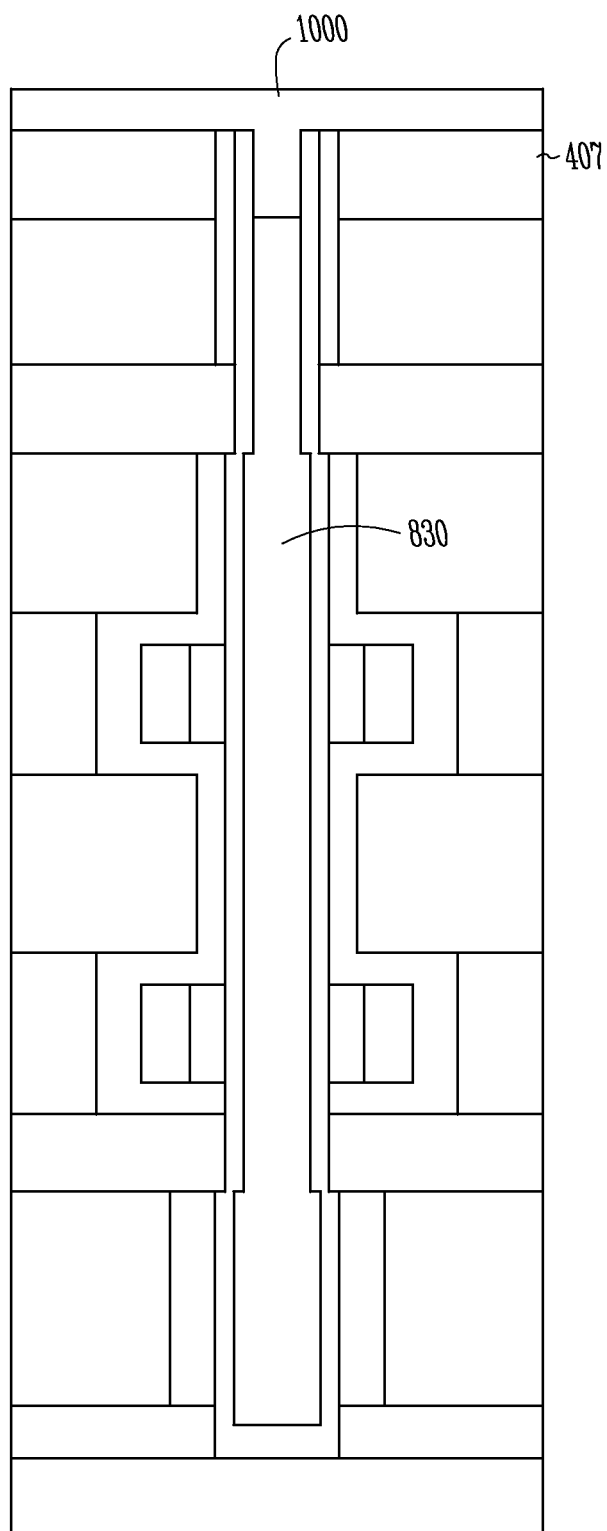


Fig. 12

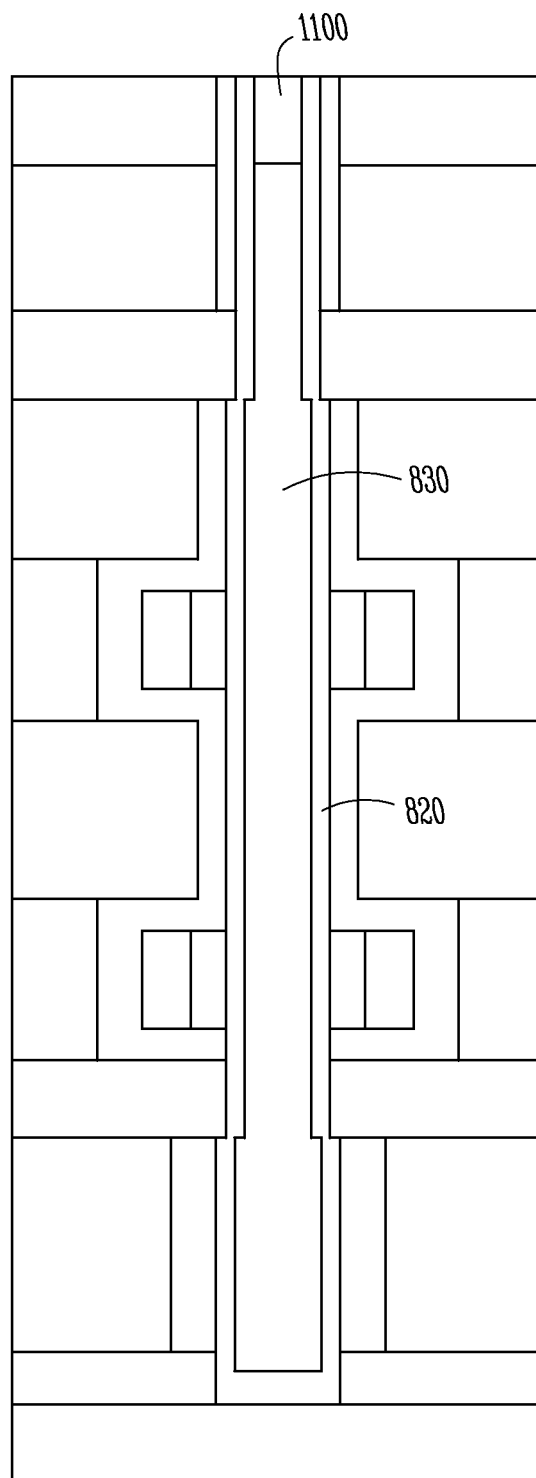


Fig. 13

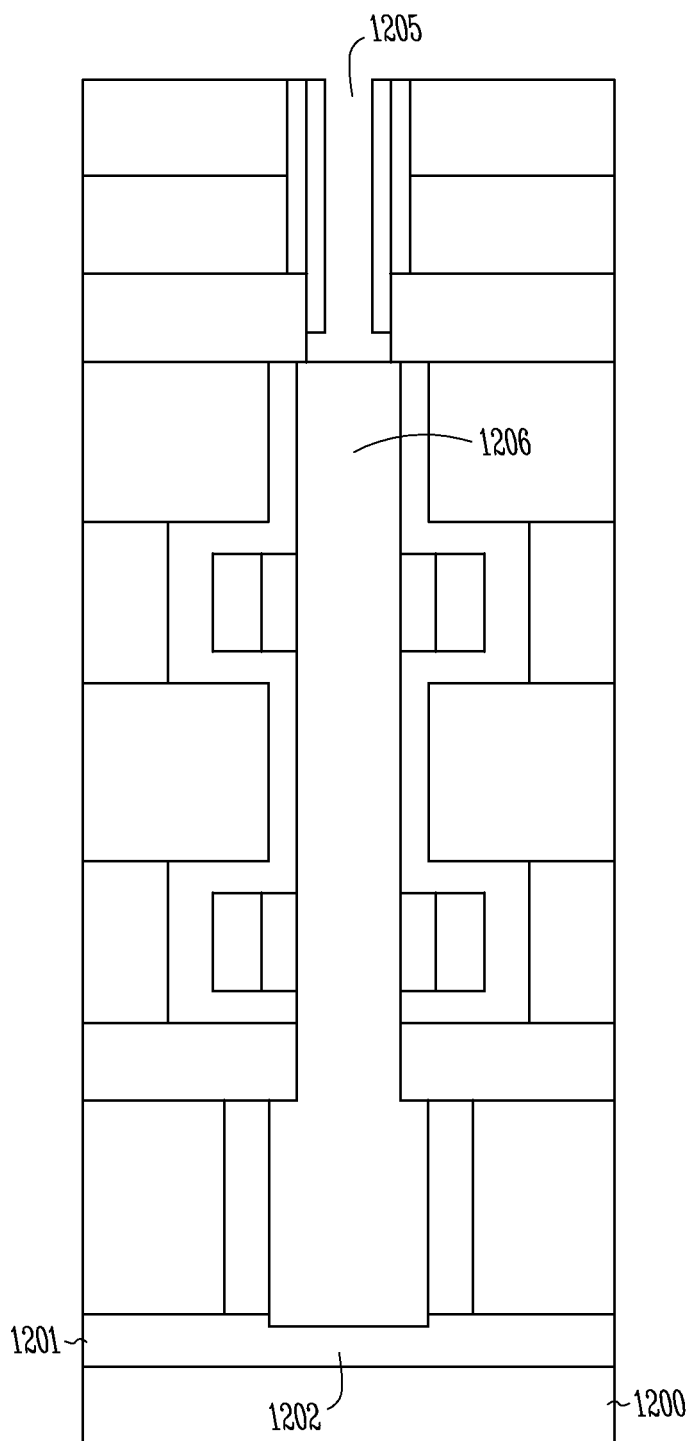


Fig. 14

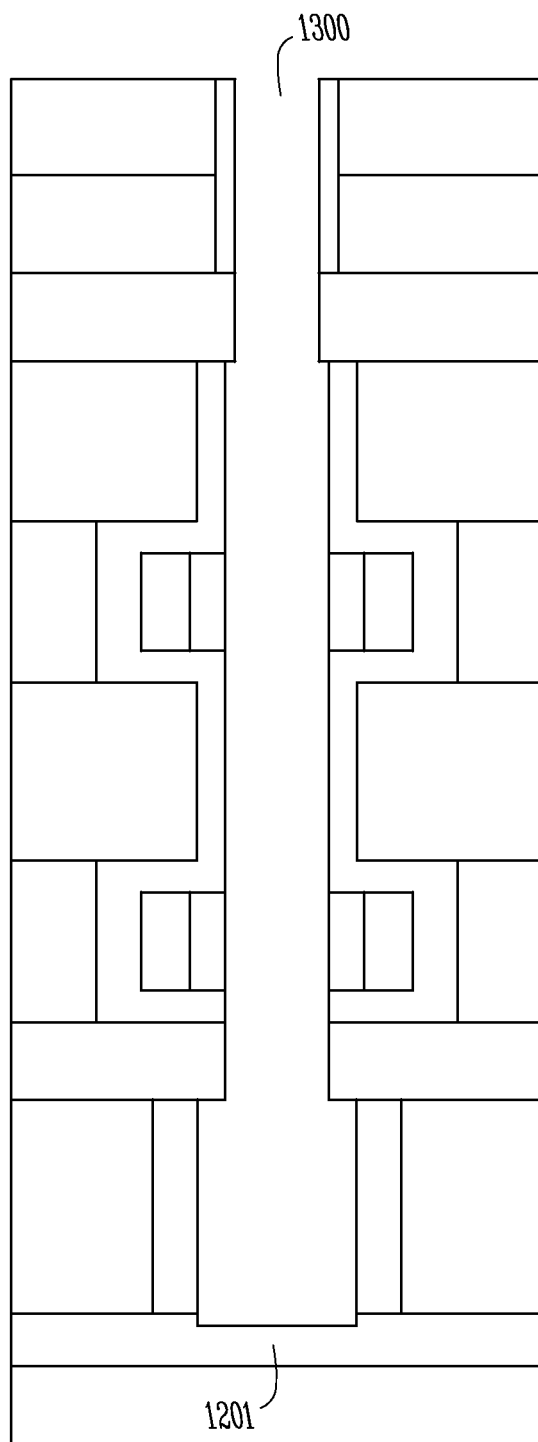


Fig. 15

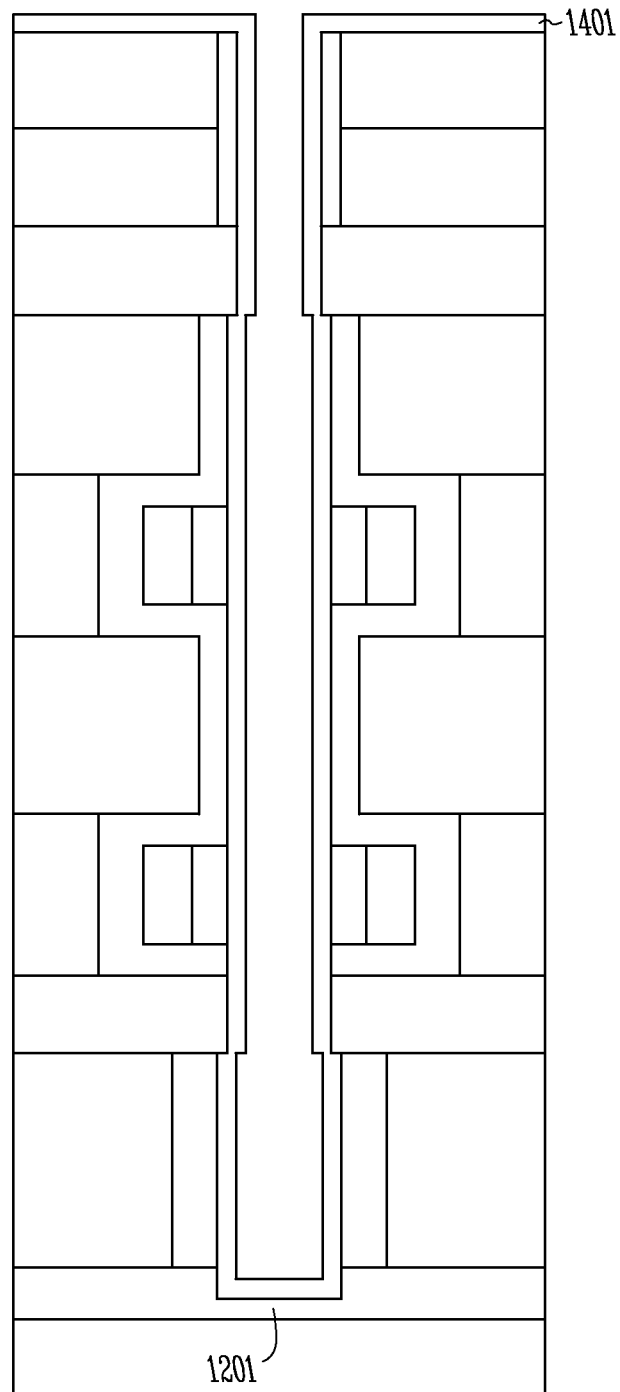


Fig. 16

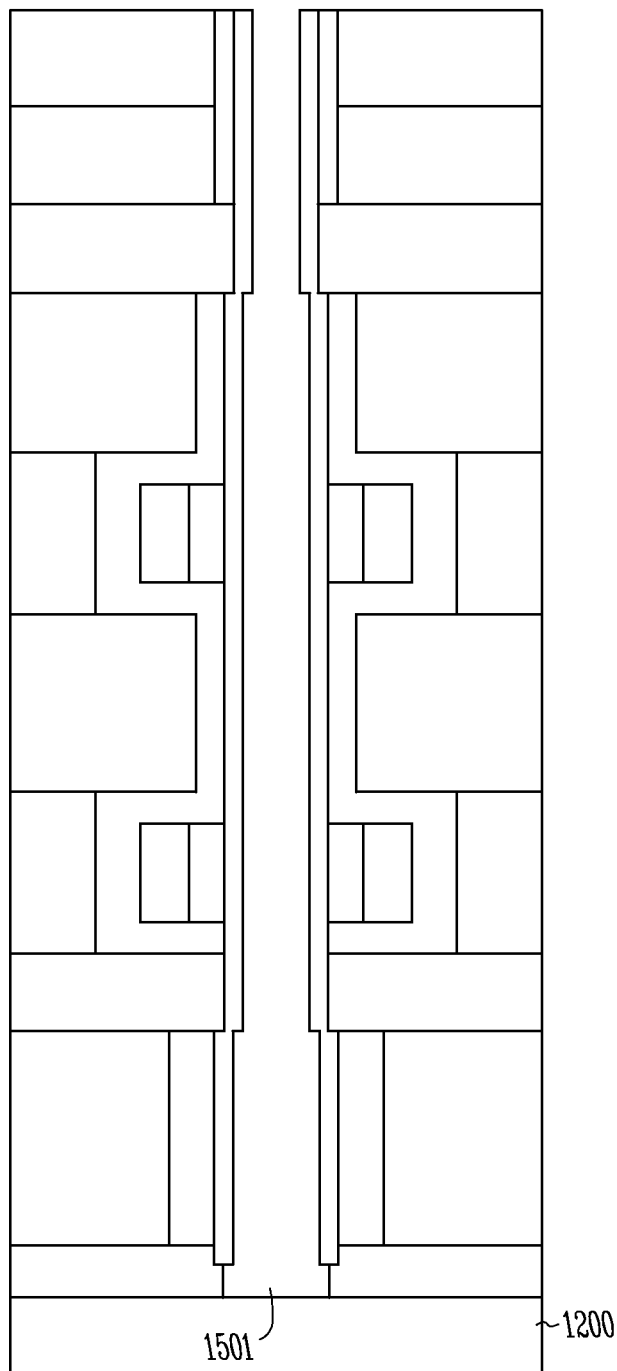


Fig. 17

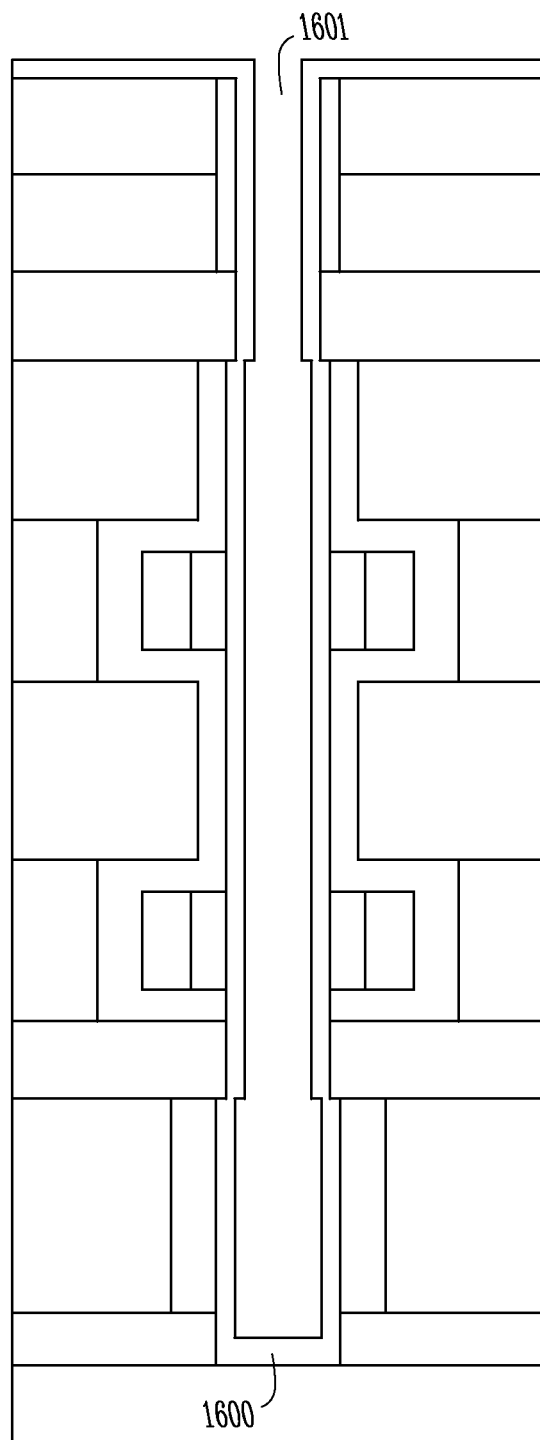
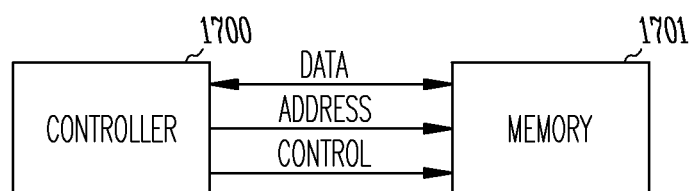


Fig. 18

*Fig. 19*

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METHODS AND APPARATUSES HAVING MEMORY CELLS INCLUDING A MONOLITHIC SEMICONDUCTOR CHANNEL

TECHNICAL FIELD

The present embodiments relate generally to memory.

BACKGROUND

Memory devices are typically provided as internal, semiconductor, integrated circuits in computers or other electronic devices. There are many different types of memory including random-access memory (RAM), read only memory (ROM), dynamic random access memory (DRAM), synchronous dynamic random access memory (SDRAM), and non-volatile (e.g., flash) memory.

Flash memory devices typically use a one-transistor memory cell that may allow for high memory densities, high reliability, and low power consumption. Changes in threshold voltage of the cells, through programming of a charge storage structure, such as floating gates, trapping layers or other physical phenomena, may determine the data state of each cell.

The memory cells may be arranged in strings of memory cells where each string may be coupled to a source. Groups of strings of memory cells (e.g., memory blocks) may all be coupled to a common source.

As the performance of computers and other electronics continues to improve, memory manufacturers may be under pressure to continue to increase the performance of memory devices. For example, reductions in memory string current and gate induced drain leakage (GIDL) might be desirable.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 illustrates a schematic diagram of an embodiment of a string of memory cells.

FIGS. 2-13 illustrate embodiments of fabrication steps for forming a vertical string of memory cells having a monolithic thin semiconductor channel and a metal source.

FIGS. 14-18 illustrate embodiments of fabrication steps for forming a vertical string of memory cells having a monolithic thin semiconductor channel and a semiconductor source.

FIG. 19 illustrates a block diagram of an embodiment of a system.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

In the following detailed description, reference is made to the accompanying drawings that form a part hereof and in which are shown, by way of illustration, specific embodiments. In the drawings, like numerals describe substantially similar components throughout the several views. Other embodiments may be utilized and structural, logical, and electrical changes may be made without departing from the scope of the present disclosure. The following detailed description is, therefore, not to be taken in a limiting sense.

FIG. 1 illustrates a schematic diagram of a string 100 of memory cells. For purposes of illustration only, the string 100 is shown having 16 memory cells 112. Alternate embodiments can include more or less than 16 memory cells 112. The string 100 can include a source select gate transistor 120 that may be an n-channel transistor coupled between one of the memory cells 112 at one end of the string

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100 and a common source 126. The common source 126 may comprise, for example, a slot of commonly doped semiconductor material and/or other conductive material. At the other end of the string 100, a drain select gate transistor 130 may be an n-channel transistor coupled between one of the memory cells 112 and a data line (e.g., bit line) 134.

Each memory cell 112 may comprise, for example, a floating gate transistor or a charge trap transistor, and may be a single level charge storage device or a multilevel charge storage device. The memory cells 112, the source select gate transistor 120, and the drain select gate transistor 130 are controlled by signals on their respective control gates, with the signals being provided on access lines (e.g., word lines) WL0-WL15. In one embodiment, the control gates of memory cells in a row of memory cells can at least partially form an access lines.

The source select gate transistor 120 receives a control signal source select gate that controls the source select gate transistor 120 to substantially control conduction between the string 100 and the common source 126. The drain select gate transistor 130 receives a control signal that controls the drain select gate transistor 130, so that the drain select gate transistor 130 can be used to select or deselect the string 100.

The string 100 can be one of multiple strings of memory cells in a block of memory cells in a memory device, such as a NAND-architecture flash memory device. Each string of memory cells may be formed vertically in a three-dimensional fashion such that they extend outward from a substrate as opposed to in a planar manner (e.g., horizontally along the substrate).

Subsequently described FIGS. 2-11 illustrate embodiments of fabrication steps for forming vertical strings of memory cells having a monolithic thin semiconductor (e.g., polysilicon) channel and a metal source. Subsequently described FIGS. 12-16 illustrate embodiments of fabrication steps for forming vertical strings of memory cells having the monolithic thin semiconductor channel and a semiconductor source. Instead of completely filling a first opening (e.g., a trench or hole) with the semiconductor material that may act as a channel during operation, the described embodiments use a monolithic thin semiconductor channel material that may line the interior of the first opening and thus act as a monolithic thin semiconductor liner. Thus, the term "thin" may refer to the thickness of the semiconductor channel material being less than the entire width of the first opening, such that a second opening (which may be filled or unfilled) is formed by the semiconductor channel material.

FIG. 2 illustrates embodiments of fabrication steps for forming a vertical string of memory cells. A metal material 200 (e.g., metal silicide) may be formed over a substrate 209 (e.g., silicon) to act as a metal source material. An oxide or polysilicon material 210 may be formed between the substrate 209 and the metal material 200.

The metal material 200 may be a pure metal or a metal silicide. In an embodiment, the metal may include one of: tungsten, tantalum, or molybdenum. In another embodiment, the metal silicide may include one of: tungsten silicide (WSi_x), tantalum silicide ($TaSi_x$), or molybdenum silicide ($MoSi_x$). A metal silicide may work better as a doped source metal since it may take doping better than a pure metal material.

A capping material 202 may be formed over the metal material 200. The capping material 202 may be an oxide material, a polysilicon material, or some other capping material for sealing pores in the metal material 200. If the

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capping material **200** is an oxide, the oxide may be used as a source select gate oxide for the source select gate transistor **120** as illustrated in FIG. **1**.

The metal material **200** can be doped **204** in order to alter its electrical properties as desired. For example, arsenic or phosphorus may be used for doping **204** the metal material to create an n-type conductor. Boron or gallium may be used to dope **204** the metal material **200** to create a p-type conductor.

FIG. **3** illustrates an embodiment of another fabrication step for forming the vertical string of memory cells. A source select gate conductive material (e.g., conductively doped polysilicon) **300** may be formed over the capping material **202**. In an embodiment, the source select gate conductive material **300** may be used as a source select gate. Thus, the capping material (e.g., source select gate oxide) **202** and the source select gate conductive material **300** together may be referred to as source select gate material.

FIG. **4** illustrates an embodiment of a series of fabrication steps for forming the vertical string of memory cells. The fabrication steps comprise forming a stack of materials **420** to be etched later.

An etch stop material **400** may be formed over the source select gate conductive material **300**. In an embodiment, the etch stop material **400** may be a metal oxide such as aluminum oxide (Al_2O_3).

A stack of alternating levels of control gate material **401**, **403** and insulator material **402**, **404** may be formed over the etch stop material **400**. For example, the control gate material **401**, **403** may be a conductive material (e.g., polysilicon) and the insulator material **402**, **404** may be an oxide material. The control gate material **401**, **403** may be used as the control gates of the vertically formed memory cells while the insulator material **402**, **404** may be used between the memory cells to isolate adjacent memory cells from each other.

The stack of materials **420** may further comprise a drain select gate insulator material **405** (e.g., oxide) and a drain select gate conductive material (e.g., conductively doped polysilicon) **406** formed over the insulating material **404** of the alternating insulator materials **402**, **404**. In an embodiment, the drain select gate insulator material **405** may be a drain select gate oxide and the drain select gate conductive material **406** may be a drain select gate polysilicon. Thus, a combination of the drain select gate insulator material **405** and the drain select gate semiconductor material **406** may both be referred to as drain select gate material.

A drain select gate nitride material **407** may be formed over the drain select gate semiconductor material **406**. In an embodiment, the drain select gate nitride material **407** may be a nitride hard mask.

FIG. **5** illustrates an embodiment of a series of fabrication steps for forming the vertical string of memory cells. An etching step may be used to form an opening **500** in the vertical stack **420** down through the etch stop material **400**. A directional etch process may be used to form recesses **501**, **503** into the control gate material **403**, **401** on the opening wall.

FIG. **6** illustrates an embodiment of a series of fabrication steps for forming the vertical string of memory cells. A dielectric material (e.g., oxide-nitride-oxide (ONO)) **600** may be formed along the interior wall of the opening **500**. The ONO material **600** may also line the walls of the recesses **501**, **503**. In an embodiment, the ONO material **600** may be used as a dielectric material (e.g., oxide, charge blocking) for the string of memory cells.

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A charge storage material, such as a polysilicon material **601**, may be formed (e.g., deposited) over the ONO material **600** along the sidewall of the opening **500**. The polysilicon material **601** may also at least partially fill (e.g., in some cases completely filling) the recesses **501**, **503**. In an embodiment, the polysilicon material **601** may be used as the floating gates for each memory cell in the string of memory cells.

FIG. **7** illustrates an embodiment of a series of fabrication steps for forming the vertical string of memory cells. A post polysilicon etch process may be used to remove polysilicon **601** (e.g., excess polysilicon) along the sidewall of the previously formed opening and to form another opening **700** through the previously formed materials **202**, **300**, **400**. The ONO material **600** along the sidewall of the drain select gate material **405**, **406** and the drain select gate nitride material **407** may be removed.

The opening **700** may be formed down to the metal material **200**. The polysilicon material **601** lining the sidewall of the opening **700** may be removed leaving the polysilicon material **601** that fills the recesses **501**, **503** to act as the floating gates (e.g., floating gate material) of the memory cells. Since etching through so much material **202**, **300**, **400** may use a powerful etching process, the metal material **200** may act as a better etch stop material than a polysilicon material.

FIG. **8** illustrates forming a gate insulator material **834**, **807** (e.g., oxide) over the drain select gate material **406**, the drain select gate nitride material **407**, and the source select gate conductive material **300**, in the opening **700**. A sacrificial poly channel pillar **800** can be formed in the opening **700**. Additionally, a sacrificial poly layer **833** can be formed over the oxide **834** to protect it during later etch processes. A tetramethylammonium hydroxide (TMAH) poly wet etch process can be used to remove the pillar **800** and the select gate source and drain poly **833** selectively to the gate oxide **834**, **807**. The wet etch process can stop on the metal material **200** as shown in FIG. **9**. An insulator material (e.g., oxide) **801**, **803** may be formed (e.g., grown) on other particular areas of the opening **700**. For example, an oxide **801**, **803** may be formed over each floating gate material **851**, **853** in each recess **501**, **503**. In an embodiment, this oxide **801**, **803** may act as a tunnel dielectric between the floating gate material **851**, **853** and a thin channel material to be formed subsequently in the opening **700**.

FIG. **10** illustrates that a monolithic semiconductor liner (e.g., polysilicon) **820** may be formed along the sidewall and bottom of the opening **700**. The monolithic semiconductor liner **820** may be formed over the previously formed insulator materials (e.g., oxides) **801-808** and the top layer of the drain select gate nitride material **407**. In an embodiment, the monolithic semiconductor liner **820** may be used as a thin channel material and operate as a channel during memory device operation. The monolithic semiconductor liner **820** may be in ohmic contact with the source material **200** and form still another opening.

The opening formed by the monolithic semiconductor liner **820** may be at least partially filled (e.g., completely filled) with an insulator material (e.g., oxide) **830**. The insulator material **830** may also be formed over the monolithic semiconductor liner **820** on the top of the stack of materials. In another embodiment, the opening formed by the monolithic semiconductor liner **820** may be left hollow. This may result in subsequent fabrication steps being adjusted to compensate for the lack of support in the interior of the opening that was provided by the insulator material **830**.

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FIG. 11 illustrates that the insulator material **830** and semiconductor liner **820** that were formed on top of the stack may be removed, and a recess formed in the insulator material **830** formed inside the opening formed by the semiconductor liner **820**. For example, an oxide and polysilicon chemical-mechanical planarization (CMP) process might be used to remove these materials and form the recess in the insulator material **830** within the opening formed by the semiconductor liner **820**.

FIG. 12 illustrates that a conductive material (e.g., conductively doped polysilicon) **1000** may be formed on the drain select gate nitride material **407** and at least partially into the recess formed into the insulator material **830** to fill the recess in the insulator material **830**.

FIG. 13 illustrates that the top portion of the conductive material **1000** may be removed from the top of the stack of materials, leaving a conductive plug **1100** in the recess. The plug **1100** may be in contact with the monolithic semiconductor liner **820** to provide additional continuity between the end of the channel as well as provide a larger surface area on which to form subsequent materials (e.g., bit line material).

FIGS. 14-18 illustrate an embodiment of fabrication steps for forming the vertical string of memory cells having the monolithic thin semiconductor channel and a semiconductor source instead of a metal source (e.g., instead of metal source material **200** in FIG. 2). Since the source may be a semiconductor source material (e.g., polysilicon) instead of metal, additional steps may be used to protect the semiconductor material during some of the etching processes. The semiconductor source material may be doped as previously described in relation to the doping of the metal source material embodiment of FIG. 2.

In the interest of brevity, most of the common steps with the embodiments of FIGS. 2-13 have already been performed. However, instead of the step of forming the metal source material **200**, the subsequent embodiments form a semiconductor (e.g., polysilicon) source material **1200**.

FIG. 14 shows the semiconductor source material **1200** with an overlying insulator material (e.g., oxide) **1201**. A thinner portion **1202** of the insulator material **1201** is under the opening **1205** that is filled with a semiconductor pillar **1206**.

FIG. 15 illustrates an embodiment of another fabrication step for forming the vertical string of memory cells. The semiconductor pillar **1206** may be removed from the opening such that only the thin insulator material **1201** remains. In an embodiment, a TMAH poly wet etch process may be used for such a step.

FIG. 16 illustrates an embodiment of another fabrication step for forming the vertical string of memory cells. A semiconductor (e.g., polysilicon) liner **1401** may be formed in the opening. The semiconductor liner **1401** may be formed over the thinner portion **1202** of the insulator material **1201** at the bottom of the opening. In an embodiment, the semiconductor liner **1401** may be the thin channel material and used as the channel region of the string of memory cells during operation.

FIG. 17 illustrates that the thinner portion **1202** of the insulator material **1201** may be removed from the bottom of the opening **1501** leaving the semiconductor source material **1200** exposed to the hollow opening. In an embodiment, this may be accomplished by an etch process (e.g., post punch etch).

FIG. 18 illustrates that a semiconductor material **1600** is formed on the bottom of the opening such that a combination of semiconductor material **1600** and semiconductor liner

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1401 forms a monolithic thin semiconductor (e.g., polysilicon) channel material along the opening walls and bottom. An insulator material (e.g., oxide) **1601** may be used to at least partially fill the hollow opening. As in previous embodiments, the insulator material **1601** may be left out in order to leave this opening hollow.

Subsequent process steps are not shown but are substantially similar to steps shown in FIGS. 11-13 wherein a plug is eventually formed to connect the thin semiconductor channel material. The plug may also be used to provide an additional surface area on which subsequent processing steps may form additional materials (e.g., bit lines).

FIG. 19 illustrates an embodiment of a system that may use the vertically formed string of memory cells of FIGS. 1-18. A controller **1700** may be used to control operations of the system. A memory device **1701**, coupled to the controller **1700**, may include a memory array comprising a plurality of vertically formed strings of memory cells described above with reference to FIGS. 1-16. In an embodiment, the controller **1700** may be coupled to the memory device **1701** over control, data, and address buses. In another embodiment, the address and data buses may share a common input/output (I/O) bus.

An apparatus may be defined as circuitry, an integrated circuit die, a device, or a system.

CONCLUSION

One or more embodiments can provide a monolithic thin semiconductor channel in a three dimensional memory device (e.g., NAND flash). The monolithic thin semiconductor channel material may be formed within a first opening. The thin semiconductor channel material may be formed such that the channel material forms an ohmic contact with a source. A second opening, formed by the monolithic thin semiconductor channel material, may be filled with an insulator material or left hollow. The top of the monolithic thin semiconductor channel material may be connected with a conductive plug.

Although specific embodiments have been illustrated and described herein, it will be appreciated by those of ordinary skill in the art that any arrangement that is calculated to achieve the same purpose may be substituted for the specific embodiments shown. Many adaptations will be apparent to those of ordinary skill in the art. Accordingly, this application is intended to cover any adaptations or variations.

What is claimed is:

1. An apparatus comprising:

a vertical string of memory cells formed at least partially in a stack of materials comprising a plurality of alternating levels of control gate material and insulator material,

wherein a memory cell of the string comprises:

a dielectric material in a recess formed in a level of the control gate material;

a charge storage structure in the recess adjacent to the dielectric material; and tunnel dielectric material adjacent to the charge storage structure wherein the tunnel dielectric material is formed only in the recess over the charge store structure and is not formed over levels of the insulator material;

wherein a monolithic channel material of the vertical string of memory cells is adjacent to the tunnel dielectric material and extends adjacent to the plurality of alternating levels of control gate material and insulator material, the channel material having a thickness that is less than a width of a first opening through the alter-

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- nating levels of control gate material and insulator material in which channel material is formed, such that a second opening is defined by the channel material and the channel material is monolithic with regard to having a single structure covering a sidewall and a bottom of the first opening;
- a conductive plug formed in the second opening to connect the channel material; and
 - a metal source coupled between the channel material and a substrate, wherein an oxide is formed between the metal source and the substrate.
2. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the dielectric material comprises an oxide-nitride-oxide material.
3. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the charge storage structure comprises polysilicon.
4. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the tunnel dielectric material comprises an oxide.
5. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the metal source and the channel material are connected by an ohmic contact.
6. The apparatus of claim 1 and further comprising:
- a source select gate material between the plurality of alternating levels of control gate material and insulator material and the metal source; and
 - a drain select gate material over the alternating levels of control gate material and insulator material.
7. A system comprising:
- a controller; and
 - a memory device coupled to the controller, the memory device comprising a memory array having a plurality of strings of memory cells, each string of memory cells of the plurality of strings of memory cells comprising:
 - a source select gate material over a metal source material, the metal source formed over a substrate wherein an oxide is formed between the metal source and the substrate;
 - a plurality of alternating levels of control gate and insulator materials over the source select gate material, each level of control gate material of the plu-

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- ality of alternating levels of control gate and insulator materials having a charge storage structure formed in a recess in each level of control gate material; and
- a monolithic vertical channel material formed along a sidewall of a first opening through the plurality of alternating levels of control gate and insulator materials and the source select gate material, the vertical channel material coupled to the metal source material and being adjacent to the charge storage structures and the source select gate material, wherein the charge storage structures and the source select gate material are separated from the vertical channel material by at least a tunnel dielectric material, the vertical channel material having a thickness that is less than a width of the first opening, such that a second opening is defined by the vertical channel material, wherein the tunnel dielectric material is formed only in the recess over the charge store structure and is not formed over levels of the insulator material and further wherein the monolithic vertical channel material is monolithic with regard to having a single structure covering the sidewall and a bottom of the first opening; and
 - a conductive plug formed at a top of the second opening to connect the vertical channel material.
8. The system of claim 7 and further comprising drain select gate material over the plurality of alternating levels of control gate and insulator materials.
9. The system of claim 7 wherein the monolithic vertical channel material is in ohmic contact with the metal source material.
10. The system of claim 7, further comprising a drain select gate material formed over a top of the plurality of alternating levels of control gate and insulator materials.
11. The system of claim 7, wherein the second opening of the monolithic vertical channel material is hollow.

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